

## STATEMENT REGARDING THE PROVISION OF PRO BONO LEGAL SERVICES BY OHIO LAWYERS

Each day, Ohioans require legal assistance to secure basic needs such as housing, education, employment, health care, and personal and family safety. Many persons of limited means are unable to afford such assistance, and legal aid programs must concentrate limited resources on those matters where the needs are most critical. The result is that many Ohioans who are facing significant legal problems do not have access to affordable legal services. These persons are forced to confront landlord-tenant issues, have questions involving employment rights, or seek protection against domestic violence without the assistance of a legal advocate.

In 1997, this Court issued a *Statement on Professionalism* that recognizes each lawyer's obligation to engage in activities that promote the common good, including the provision of and support for pro bono representation to indigent clients. In 2007, in the *Preamble to the Ohio Rules of Professional Conduct*, the Court reemphasized the importance of this obligation by stating:

A lawyer should be mindful of deficiencies in the administration of justice and of the fact that the poor, and sometimes persons who are not poor, cannot afford adequate legal assistance. Therefore, all lawyers should devote professional time and resources and use civic influence to ensure equal access to our system of justice for those who because of economic or social barriers cannot afford or secure legal counsel.

Lawyers, law firms, bar associations, and legal services organizations, such as the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation, have done and continue to do much to address unmet civil legal needs through the organization of, support for, and participation in pro bono legal services programs. Although these programs have increased both in number and scope in recent years, there remains an urgent need for more pro bono services.

This Court strongly encourages each Ohio lawyer to ensure access to justice for all Ohioans by participating in pro bono activities. There are pro bono programs available throughout Ohio that are sponsored by bar associations, legal aid programs, churches and civic associations. Many

programs offer a variety of free legal services, while others concentrate on specific legal needs. Lawyers also may choose to participate in programs that focus on the needs of specific individuals such as senior citizens, the disabled, families

of military personnel or immigrants. The Web site [www.ohioprobono.org](http://www.ohioprobono.org) contains a complete, searchable listing of pro bono programs and opportunities in Ohio. A lawyer may fulfill this professional commitment by providing legal counsel to charitable organizations that may not be able to afford to pay for legal services or by making a financial contribution to an organization that provides legal services to persons of limited means.

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The Court recognizes that many Ohio lawyers honor their professional commitment by regularly providing pro bono legal services or financial support to pro bono programs. Moreover, the Court encourages lawyers to respond to this call by seeking to engage in new or additional pro bono opportunities. To document the efforts and commitment of the legal profession to ensure equal access to justice, the Court, in conjunction with the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation, will develop a means by which Ohio lawyers may report voluntarily and anonymously their pro bono activities and financial support for legal aid programs. The information regarding pro bono efforts will not only underscore the commitment of the legal profession to serving the public good but also will serve as a constant reminder to the bar of the importance of pro bono service.

ISSUED BY THE SUPREME COURT OF OHIO  
SEPTEMBER 20, 2007